Interview with Marlen E. Neumann

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Foreign Service Spouse Series

MARLEN E. NEUMANN

Interviewed by: Penne Laingen

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Q: This is Penne Laingen. I am interviewing Marlen Neumann at her home in Bethesda, Maryland, on Friday, January 15, 1988.

I noticed one thing in your biographical interview form that you seem to have been internationally oriented from the time you were born. You were born in India?

NEUMANN: That is right, yes. I grew up there until I was six going on seven.

Q: And then your travels in the summertime, your career experiences, even your college with a major in French, I believe...

NEUMANYes, and a minor in international relations.

Q: ...almost seem as if you were destined to become an ambassador's wife. (laughs)

NEUMANN: (laughs)

Q: I want to go very little into your background today, however, because you have a very thorough biographical sheet and what we're mainly interested in is your Foreign Service

experience. But there are a few things I want to ask you about in your prior Foreign Service life. For instance, I wondered under what circumstances you met Bob?

NEUMANN: We met in Geneva, Switzerland, in the summer of 1937 when we were both students at Sir Alfred and Lady Zimmern's School of International Studies, the summer school there in Geneva. Robert had had an opportunity either to come on a half scholarship from Austria that year or full scholarship the next year, and he took the half scholarship. Otherwise, we wouldn't have met.

Q: You would never have met. Can you tell me a little bit about his background? He's from Austria?

NEUMANN: He's Austrian by birth, born in Vienna, grew up there. He was interested in diplomatic life and studied there in Vienna, but didn't finish because of the Nazi takeover of Austria. He had applied to travel to go abroad. He was active in the Austrian League of Nations Association and the Austrian Foreign Policy Association, and that helped out. He was in concentration camp after we met.

Q: He was in concentration camp after you met?

NEUMANN: After we met, yes. He had been also very active in the Socialist Party. As he says nowadays, “To be a good Republican, you have to have started as a Socialist.” (laughs)

Q: (laughs) Oh, I see.

NEUMANN: And so he was in concentration camp, and the Institute of International Education in New York helped him to get a scholarship at Amherst when he was released from concentration camp. And nobody ever knew why he was released, but he was finally.

Q: What year was he released?

Neumann: 1939. He was taken in 1938 and he was in Dachau and Buchenwald.

[Dachau was one of the first concentration camps set up in Germany by the Nazis in 1933 and stood near the town of Dachau, ten miles from Munich. It was built as an extermination camp for Jews and political prisoners. After 1943, prisoners worked in arms factories built there, and the Nazis performed brutal medical experiments on more than 3500 persons, almost all of whom died. Thousands more were executed or died of starvation and epidemics. United States forces liberated about 32,000 prisoners at Dachau on April 29, 1945.

Buchenwald was located near Weimar, Germany, and was also established by the Nazis in 1933 to house political and racial prisoners, who worked as slave laborers in nearby arms factories and quarries. More than 100,000 people from German-occupied countries throughout Europe died at Buchenwald from starvation and other causes. American troops liberated about 21,000 survivors in April, 1945.]

And one of the things he had wanted to be was in diplomatic life and, of course, he couldn't there. When he got to America, he had to do other things. You can't just get into diplomatic life when you're an alien, and then when you're a naturalized citizen, you have to wait. By the time he was naturalized, he was in the War.

Q: In what way was he in the War? He went in the Army, didn't he?

NEUMANN: Yes. He volunteered to be drafted, because he was still an alien. He got his naturalization papers in Colorado Springs where he was stationed.

Q: And you were married by then?

NEUMANN: Yes. When he was released from concentration camp, I was in India. I had gone out as private secretary to my aunt, Ruth Woodsmall, who was General Secretary of the World's YWCA.

Q: So, tell me about your marriage, which took place on July 27, 1941, and why you had to be married on an island which was outside the United States. Is that not true?

NEUMANN: No, no, no, no. Bustin's Island, Maine? It's in Casco Bay, very much in the United States. He met me at the boat when I came back from India and then he went to Amherst, and I went to Yale to do my graduate, my master's degree, there. My father was not at all happy about my marrying a refugee, nor that Robert was a Catholic and I was Protestant. In the South where we lived, Tennessee at that time, Catholics had very strict rules about marrying Protestants, and Dad just generally didn't approve.

By the time Robert and I were ready to be married, Dad was no longer in Tennessee. He was working for the War Production Board in Washington, DC. He and Mother lived in a one-bedroom apartment — in the Marlyn apartments — and Mother backed us, very much so. She had a friend who had a house on Bustin's Island, which is mostly a small island where just people live, not a tourist place, and the friend said we could be married there. So we were.

As the weeks went by — Mother and I were there about three weeks beforehand — we kept meeting people on the Island, and Mother would say, “Come to the wedding!” And so, (laughs), more people came, but my father didn't come. My father's Cousin Eunice came and my Aunt Ruth and Mother and a missionary friend and his son, who backed me, took me down the aisle, so it worked out beautifully. The funny thing was, years later...by which time Dad had gotten accustomed to Robert and decided he really liked him after all, and my mother had died... Dad married Eunice, his cousin (they were both in their eighties by that time)...who did Dad ask to be his best man at their wedding in California? Robert...my husband.

Q: I love that.

NEUMANN: Isn't that ironic?

Q: What irony! That's a marvelous story.

Another thing I wanted to ask you about your prior Foreign Service life was what was your role in the League of Women Voters in the State of California?

NEUMANN: I had many roles at the League of Women Voters. I was on some board or other almost all of the nineteen years that I lived there, except for the periods when I was overseas with Robert on...not vacation...what's the word I want when a man has leave from the university?

Q: Sabbatical?

NEUMANN: Sabbatical, that's right, yes. I was on the State Board, I was City President on the City Board. I began by being in charge of fiscal studies for the State of California, then I was on United Nations matters. As League President, I represented the League in the Non-Governmental Organizations group there in California, and I went to a number of national conventions as a League delegate...very active. And once I was United Nations Chairman for my unit, United Nations Chairman for the City of Los Angeles, United Nations Chairman for the State Board. Believe me, don't ever do that when you're reporting to yourself. It's very silly.

Q: Why is that?

NEUMANN: Well, I was reporting as Unit Chairman to myself as City Board member. Then I was reporting as City Board to the State Board for representing all the cities.

Q: Oh, I see. Was it your capacity on the League of Women Voters that led to your work on the McCone Commission?

NEUMANN: I think it was, because the Governor appointed a group of eight people under John McCone to look into the riots in Watts in the central area of Los Angeles. He tried to

find people who were known as non-partisan, and being a League President, I was very definitely non-partisan.

Q: Good.

NEUMANN: Also, I had been a Civil Service Commissioner in the City of Los Angeles for two years, so all that might have brought me to his attention.

Q: And it was Governor Pat Brown...

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: ...that appointed you?

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: How long did the Commission go on?

NEUMANN: We had only from August to December as a sitting commission to bring in our report, but our staff work went on for two years after that.

Q: What conclusions did they come to? Anything you could pinpoint?

NEUMANN: We came to so many conclusions that it would be very difficult to pinpoint. But I guess the basic conclusion was that the whole situation had festered just as situations around the world are festering now, and people on the side of authority — let's say the whites in Los Angeles — had not really accepted what was happening in the black areas, how frustrated the black areas, the black people in those areas, were. We had a lot of solutions. One of them was Head Start. Some of our solutions were accepted. I've seen some real changes. Some were not, and there is still frustration, but it's not quite as violent as it was. And until now, there have been no outbreaks. I keep my fingers crossed.

Q: Was there great burning of buildings as there was in Washington?

NEUMANN: Oh yes, but it was mostly in the black area in what one calls the ghetto, which was a huge area.

Q: Has it been built up again?

NEUMANN: A part of it, yes, definitely. A hospital has gone up in that area that hadn't had a hospital before. A lot of city services that were very difficult for blacks to reach have now branches in that part of town.

Q: ...which you could say did stem from the McCone Commission's work?

NEUMANN: I think so, yes. One of the McCone Commissioners, Dr. Sherman Mellinkoff, was very much involved in having the Martin Luther King Hospital built.

Q: What was the year of the riots? 1965?

NEUMANN: Yes, 1965. And we were on 1965 through December, and then the staff work, as I say, went on. Robert was appointed Ambassador to Afghanistan in the Fall of 1966, and I left town in January of 1967.

Q: I see. That does lead right into my next question that your life in the Foreign Service did begin in October of 1966 when your husband was appointed by Lyndon Johnson, who was a Democrat.

NEUMANN: ...but who knew that my husband was a Republican. Robert had been doing work first with the Defense Department one week a month and then later with the State Department one week a month. He had done some special trips in Algeria and in Iraq for the State Department in the summers, so that he was known. He was clued in, and I think definitely the fact that Senator Thomas Kuchel, a very moderate Republican, vouched for

him probably had a lot to do with his being appointed. Robert was always our international expert. (laughs) I was called the domestic expert in the family.

Q: (laughs) Right, right. Well, you definitely were a woman in your own right. I've always thought that, Marlen. You did not take your reputation from your husband's career. So how did you feel — and now, we're going to get into feelings, rather than dates and bio information — I'm really curious if you had any feelings about giving up your activities and accompanying your husband overseas?

NEUMANN: No indeed. I was very glad to do it. It was a wonderful opportunity, besides which I had gotten a little bit entangled in too much domestic activity...the NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations Council), the Metropolitan Board for the Deaf (we have one son who's deaf or almost totally deaf), the League of Women Voters. The YWCA was constantly calling...would I be on the Board? I was very glad to get away from all that to tell you the truth.

Q: (laughs) To escape?

NEUMANN: To escape! And, of course, for my husband it was a totally exciting thing to do.

Q: Of course.

NEUMANN: Afghanistan was right next door to India where I had grown up.

Q: Well, that's true.

NEUMANN: His major concern was...and mine too...but I mean when he was asked to take this position, his first concern was what would our younger son do for schooling, because one son was already in college, but one was in the ninth grade.

Q: Yes.

NEUMANN: That worked out fine, because there was a very good school in Kabul (AISK, the American-International School of Kabul).

Q: That's right. And he, Greg, seemed very happy there.

NEUMANN: Yes, he was.

Q: It was a lovely house, wasn't it? The Residence...

NEUMANN: Yes, it's a beautiful house.

Q: ...spread out...adobe house. So you felt that perhaps, though, that your previous life's work had led you to being well prepared to being an ambassador's wife?

NEUMANN: I felt very comfortable in the idea of being an ambassador's wife. I felt very uncomfortable about what would I be doing, what were my duties as an ambassador's wife, and quite concerned about how to handle servants. I had grown up with servants in India, and we had had a maid of all activities in Memphis, but I had not really had a staff. And I knew I would be having a staff of nine people in Kabul. I was much more concerned about handling them than about meeting the King and Queen, because I knew somebody would tell me what to do when I met the King and Queen.

We stopped in Greece on our way out to see Ambassador and Mrs. Phillips Talbott — old friends — who briefed me and Robert on all sorts of things that we needed to know. Then we stopped in Tehran to see Armin and Alice Meyer, and Alice Meyer told me all the things she did, so that I had some preparation. Then our Defense Attach# and his wife and one or two other people met us in Tehran with the Defense Attach# plane and flew us to Kabul. So by the time we arrived in Kabul and the whole country team, men and women, were all lined up by the red carpet to greet us, I was a little bit prepared.

Q: Great. Did you get any preparation from the Department of State itself?

NEUMANN: Yes, I did. Not nearly as much as people get nowadays, but there were briefing sessions in protocol and security and various other things I've forgotten, and I took the two-week course at the Overseas Briefing Center. It was then called the Course for Wives, and that was excellent because it brought me up-to-date on American things, on American art and American music, so that when I got to Kabul and met people there, I could talk, for half an hour anyway, about the latest trends in America.

Q: Did you have the impression from doing all these things with the Department of State and the Overseas Briefing Center that you definitely had a role they wanted you to fulfill?

NEUMANN: Frankly, I never thought about it one way or the other. I knew that I had a role to fulfill, yes. They gave me enough knowledge so that I felt that I fitted into their picture. Beyond that, they didn't really say we expect you to do this, that or the other thing. They didn't give me any particular briefing as one gets nowadays on representational expenses or on that side of what an ambassador's wife must do. I learned that by trial and error.

Q: Did you know at that time that you were on your husband's efficiency report?

NEUMANN: No, I did not.

Q: I didn't either.

NEUMANN: Really?

Q: But I think through all the unspoken ways that they got it across to you that there was a role they wanted you to fulfill,

NEUMANN: They certainly didn't expect me to sit back and just twiddle my thumbs.

Q: Right. I don't want to put words in your mouth either or try and get my opinions across in my questions. I hope you are telling me exactly what you felt, to go back and try to remember how you felt or didn't feel.

NEUMANN: For instance, there's that old phrase “two-for-the-price-of-one,” which riles some people. Now that never bothered me. I felt that I was getting so much in terms of the servants, the house, the opportunity to meet all sorts of distinguished individuals whom I wouldn't have met as frequently at home in Los Angeles, even though we did have a good many foreign statesmen coming to the house one way or another through Robert's contacts. But even so, I was getting so much that it didn't occur to me to feel at all resistant or rebellious or anything like that. We often did things as “two-for-the-price-of-one”. For example, after home leave once, we gave a talk together about our impressions of America. My husband talked and then I talked and then he talked. We divided the material up beforehand.

Q: So, for you, it was a viable partnership?

NEUMANN: Very much.

Q: You were not second to him or anything like that. It was definitely a partnership?

NEUMANN: It was, and it was so because he included me in things, too. It wouldn't have been a partnership otherwise, but he very much counted on my being there with him. And for us, of course, he came home for lunch everyday, which he had not done in Los Angeles, so we were actually closer in some ways there, being able to talk more to each other, than we had been in California.

Q: Well, it's interesting...Bob being of the old world, you might say, and, I think, probably of a very traditional European background, and yet he seemed so progressive in the way that he accepted your role and encouraged your role as a partner in the Foreign Service.

NEUMANN: In fact, even before we married, he encouraged me to write an article on India that was published in Survey Graphic, and people had said, “Oh, you're going to marry an Austrian and he will expect you to be at home in the kitchen,” but he was never like that.

Q: No. Wonderful. I also wanted to ask you, as a political appointee's wife, do you recall having any adjustments to make to career people or to the Foreign Service career system? Were you aware of any attitudes of career people toward you as political appointees?

NEUMANN: I think career people on the whole were very delicate and gentle in their attitudes to me, whatever they may have had in their minds. I was concerned that I would follow the traditional patterns and not make it difficult for them when they would go to another post, so I never encouraged anybody to call me by my first name. I understand it's being done a lot now.I felt that in all the instructions you're given it says you're to be “Mrs. Neumann,” “Mrs. Smith,” “Mrs. So-and-So,” so I felt that it was easier for them if I remained “Mrs. Neumann.” Then if they went to another post and they'd be working under “Mrs. Somebody Else,” they wouldn't have to make the transition.

I was quite concerned about the matter of hats, because this was in a period when women were starting not to wear hats as much, and my predecessor's wife always wore a hat and always wore gloves and insisted that other ladies also wear them. I don't look good in a hat. My hair is the wrong style. I debated this very seriously, took a lot of hats with me, but arrived hatless when I got off the airplane. And I was told there was a great sigh of relief. (laughs)

Q: (laughs) I love that. That's wonderful. Did the Deputy Chief of Mission's wife, our good friend, Meg Blood, help you with protocol and so forth?

NEUMANN: Oh, I tell you Meg and Arch helped enormously, just as you and your husband helped, and then Sallie and Sam Lewis. I mean, each one of you helped to train me.

Q: But by the time Bruce and I arrived, we felt you were well acclimated to the system and we never felt that you were neophytes.

NEUMANN: Thank you.

Q: And to this day, I think you have made it, the Foreign Service, your own, so to speak, and really have become one of us. There never was that climate...

NEUMANN: And I never felt any resistance. There may very well have been resistance, but I didn't feel it. We met the Budget Officer, Sherman Fine, and his wife, Anna, here in Washington before we went out, so they could see what sort of strange animals we were and report back to people. (laughs) And they were marvelous. You know the old rule, everybody had to meet the Ambassador and his wife within 24 hours? How could I possibly meet everybody within 24 hours? So we had established by letter beforehand that the country team would meet me first and they would come to the house. The Residence was full of narcissus flowers in little vases all over. Then I found out later that everybody had loaned their vases, because the Residence had no vases. (laughs)

Q: Oh, how nice.

NEUMANN: And then each country team wife would have me meet her group separately in a coffee or a tea in the following two weeks.

Q: Yes. I remember when I came, you were gone, the Political Counselor's wife was sick in Germany, the AID Director's wife was gone...

NEUMANN: Good heavens!

Q: ...and as I recall, the person who greeted me was Dotty Diehl.

NEUMANN: Oh?

Q: And you had set up all these lists, or she had, so that I could be welcomed the way that you had been welcomed. It seemed morning, noon and night that I was going to coffees, teas, and receptions. And then, in the middle of that, I had to rush over to the Dispensary to get a Gamma Globulin shot from Astrid Carter. You remember her? The lovely nurse?

NEUMANN: Yes I do.

Q: In the evening, I went to another party, and there was Astrid. And someone said to her, "Have you met Mrs. Laingen yet?" And she said, "Oh yes, I know her intimately." (laughs) But I remember that took two solid weeks, going morning, noon, and night to meet the community.

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: So I want you to describe, if you can remember it, the American community, what it consisted of, approximate numbers, that sort of thing.

NEUMANN: I remember one little detail here. The AID Director's wife, Peter McClure, was simply marvelous in knowing everything about — well, it seemed everything — about everybody in the AID mission, and she would fill me in, as she would take me to an AID tea or an AID coffee, with all the details: so-and-so is married, has children, and this and that. She really had wonderful interest in her group.

There were, I think, twelve contract teams in Kabul at that time from different universities in America, some of which had only a few people, some which had many people. There was a very large AID division, of course. Our Embassy and all of its political and economic and other sections. And then there was the American School, which was a little bit aside from that with a group of American teachers, and there was Ahlman Academy, which was a religious school, a Christian school, with some Americans teaching in it.

Q: And the military?

NEUMANN: There was the military, the whole military, the attach# branch of the Embassy. The Ewans were the top people there: Win and Mac Ewan. And there were two air attach#s, an assistant air attach#. No naval attach# — I'm thinking of Michener's book, which has a naval attach#...

Q: Yes, in a landlocked country!

NEUMANN: ...which has a naval attach# at the Embassy.

Q: That's right, Caravans.

NEUMANN: Caravans, yes, has a naval attach# who is the Charg# d'Affaires, which is ridiculous. Maybe he put that in on purpose to show it was fiction.

So there were about one thousand Americans, counting wives, a few mothers or aunts, and children. There were only a few private Americans there — one, the man who started the airline there, Peter Baldwin. Then there were people like the Charles Bennetts who were with Pan Am to assist Ariana Airlines.

Q: Yes. And the Peace Corps.

NEUMANN: There was a large Peace Corps contingent. Who else?

Q: USIS.

NEUMANN: Oh yes, of course, USIS.

Q: And then, the missionary doctors, but we couldn't refer to them as missionaries.

NEUMANN: Ah yes, there were missionaries there. There were CARE Medico doctors who came for a few months at a time, most of them, but a few stayed, like the William Corbetts. They were stationed there.

Q: It was a very happy, high morale post at that time, wasn't it?

NEUMANN: It was very happy, oh yes, oh yes. I found the posts where we have been, which tend to be small, tend to have high morale. I don't know whether that comes with the post or what, but it certainly did there. There was very good rapport with the other diplomatic missions. You remember? There were twenty-one resident ambassadors of a total representation of perhaps sixty, but the others were stationed elsewhere and came once or twice a year. We all took part. We went to each other's affairs and we all took part in putting on plays and musical comedies and Christmas events and so forth. So there was good intermixing.

Q: We certainly counted it as our favorite post, and it's always been amazing to me that when the Department of State first introduced the psychiatric branch that one of the first posts that got a resident psychiatrist was Kabul, Afghanistan.

NEUMANN: Oh, really? I didn't realize that.

Q: Supposedly because of its isolation and the drinking, and it was described as a totally different post than we had known it. [During the years that Neumann and Laingen lived in Kabul, however, 1966 to 1973, there was a steady influx of “hippies” from the United States, Great Britain and Europe, which accelerated the drug trafficking and began to add to the American community's problems, particularly among some of its teenagers. Also, the Department was very concerned about the emotional welfare of State Department families in Afghanistan when Ambassador “Spike” Dubs was murdered there in 1979. Dr. Elmore Rigamer was the first resident psychiatrist in Kabul.]

NEUMANN: Strange.

Q: We felt for our children at those ages (two, seven and nine years old on arrival in Kabul) that it was the perfect time to be there, with mountain climbing and countryside picnics...

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: And the Afghans liked Americans.

NEUMANN: Yes, the Afghans liked us, and we liked the Afghans. And we did get into Afghan homes, all over the country, and we did get into travels with Afghans. There was a real community there of interest and friendship, friendships which have lasted to this day.

Q: I agree.Can you state what innovations you and Bob introduced into the American community? What comes to my mind are country team briefings for the spouses which was started after we arrived in 1968.

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: ...which was different, I think.

NEUMANN: Actually, there is a book called This Worked for Me. I don't know whether you've ever seen it. It was not printed. It was reproduced, and it was a book containing all sorts of remarks by former ambassadors about what had worked for them in different countries. Very useful book, and in that somewhere, Robert picked up the idea of country team briefings. I'm not sure whether it mentioned wives or not, but he decided to brief all the wives of the country team leaders once a month on what was going on in the Embassy.

And then, I decided that in order to be in closer touch with the American community, I needed something. I felt an ambassador's wife was a sort of two-way street. She knows what's going on in the country and she can help others to find their place and can help the country by knowing what the Americans can contribute to it. So I formed a Wives Advisory Council which was made up of the wife of the head of each section and then four wives who represented all the contract teams, because it would have been too big a

group to have them all. Then, I think whoever was education liaison, USIS maybe it was, represented the AISK teachers. I tried to reach all the Americans in Kabul.

Now this worked beautifully as long as we had the old system of senior wives and junior wives. But when the new Directive came out in 1972, all of a sudden there weren't anymore senior wives. For anyone who doesn't know the distinction, I suppose I should say that the senior wife was not necessarily the oldest woman. She was the wife of the head of a section. When the new Directive came out, then each group of women had to get together to decide who would represent her section on the Wives Advisory Council.

Q: So you kept the Advisory Council?

NEUMANN: Well, I kept it for a year. Then I began to find out that it had become a sort of a plum to be on it, that among the Americans in Kabul, if you were on the Ambassador's wife's Wives Advisory Council, you had a little bit more prestige or something. It kind of got to be, as I say, a plum to be on it, and then it wasn't quite as useful. So I didn't really use it the last year I was there.

Q: I don't see how it would have worked as well anyway, once the hierarchy of spouses had been destroyed. Frankly, the ambassador's wife, under the Directive, supposedly became one like all the rest — which I doubt. I mean, I questioned that she could be like the rest. I don't think she can be...

NEUMANN: No, I don't think she can be either.

Q: ...on a par with the others, and therein lies her dilemma. But suddenly you are dealing with a whole new system, a networking kind of system, while the hierarchy remains in place for the officers, particularly for the Ambassador, but not for the spouse.

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: And the spouses don't really have any authority.

NEUMANN: Well, this is where my civic experience came in very handily, because as a leader in civic affairs, I had never had any outside authority. I had always had to work through networking and compromise and getting along with people and finding out what people were willing to do. When the new system came, it wasn't too hard on me. I didn't really find too much difference. I remember that when the second Indo-Pak War was on and Kabul was designated as a place to which people would come, Robert asked me to set up — were you there then, Penne?

Q: No. I had that among my questions, so go ahead.

NEUMANN: Well, Robert asked me to head up all the work of finding housing for them and taking on all that hospitality side, so I got together with the other women and asked who wanted to help. Of course, they were very willing to help, and we did a survey of every home in Kabul, how much room they had to take in people, could they take pets, children and so forth. We had a good listing to which we could fit incoming people as they arrived. Then, there was a hospitality center set up in the basement of the Embassy building. There were people at the border to receive those who came. We were an onwards post. People went on from us to other places.

I remember one day it was somebody's turn to come and staff the hospitality center, and I called her. She said she really couldn't come, because she was in a bridge tournament. This was vital. It was her turn to be at the bridge tournament. Well, of course, it was all right. I found somebody else. I mean, in the old days, I suppose an ambassador's wife might have said, “You've got to come.” But I didn't work that way.

Q: So, in that sort of incident, the 1972 Directive was a breath of fresh air. I think some of the old timers had difficulty adjusting to it. Not you, because you had always worked that way.

NEUMANN: Yes, I wasn't an old timer in the Foreign Service

Q: I think there was a lot of juggling that went on among people for years.

NEUMANN: Well, let me carry forward...

Q: Yes, do.

NEUMANN: We went to Morocco in 1974. Now Morocco's quite different from Afghanistan in that it's so close to Europe. It's not isolated. People can go on vacation very easily, to Spain or to other parts of the world. From Afghanistan, it wasn't so easy to go on vacation, as you remember. When we got to Morocco, I was told very kindly and gently that people really didn't want to be organized. Okay. I didn't organize. I hadn't been there two months before wives in the Embassy were coming to me and saying, “Can't we get together? We lack intellectual stimulation. Can't we have some sort of a book review group or something like that?” So then I did organize something, because they wanted it.

Q: And they still came to you, expecting your leadership, even though the hierarchy of spouses no longer existed. I find that significant.

NEUMANN: Hmmmm.

Q: I suppose it was a personal thing, too. You had the ability to organize, but in their minds, you still were their leader.

NEUMANN: I guess so. I hadn't thought about that.

Q: I think there's still a lot of that around...the need for leadership in some overseas communities.

NEUMANN: It's there.

Q: And if the Ambassador's wife does not provide it, there can be difficulty, because it could fail on someone else...the Deputy Chief of Mission's wife ...

NEUMANN: Oh yes.

Q: ...or someone like that perhaps? There are still traditional traces.

NEUMANN: Well, there has to be. There has to be a leader, and what the leader or what his wife does is like dropping a pebble into a pool. The ripples go out. And if there is an ambassador's wife who doesn't drop any pebbles in any pool and there aren't any ripples, then everybody is sort of at loose ends. It then devolves on the DCM's wife to fill in, but she never has quite the authority. And sometimes, the Deputy Chief of Mission isn't married or his wife isn't there or the DCM is a woman who can't do two things like that, and so then it again becomes very difficult for the post.

Q: You mentioned in your topic sheet that you had an evolving feeling about compensation for spouses or the role of the spouse. You indicated in a way that you had changed: your views. I wonder if you could illuminate me on what you meant by the changing role?

NEUMANN: Well, I have been very definitely opposed to paying the spouse when she was getting so many side benefits by being the spouse and from being in that position.

Q: You are speaking mainly about the Ambassador's wife or the Chief of Mission's wife?

NEUMANN: I'm speaking of the Ambassador's wife — let's say the Chief of Mission's wife — because I felt that really as the spouse of the Chief of Mission, it was her duty to complement what her husband was doing, and I didn't...

Q: Sometimes it's the other compliment. (laughs)

NEUMANN: (laughs) But she was provided a home leave and so many other things that come as perquisites of the position that I didn't see any need for it. However, in these

twenty years since we first got into diplomatic life, a great deal has changed in society and in the world around. This has influenced my thinking. I've been noticing, too, that wives of presidents of big universities and small universities have very much the same problems as wives of chiefs of missions.

There's a very interesting book called Volunteer or Volunteered? on that subject. Now fewer women on the whole see the role of the wife of the Chief of Mission in the same way that I did. For more women there are career problems. My career was always the civic volunteer side of things, so for me as an ambassador's wife, I was still the civic volunteer. Other women go overseas often leaving some particular career in the United States when they go as spouse of a chief of mission, so it's more difficult for them. There are more people just in general in society feeling that spouses should be paid, so I'm shifting a little bit in my viewpoint. But I don't quite know how it would work out.

Now the idea that the Association of American Foreign Service Women (AAFSW) created, which is sort of in limbo now, of Foreign Service liaison, has some merit where a spouse at post, who had her own career, could hire or the Embassy could hire somebody to assist her in all the representational work in organizing dinners and parties and getting the cook to buy the right food and counting up how many bottles of liquor had been used and how many cans of Coca Cola and writing up the requirements for repayment, all that side of things.

Q: Are you speaking of the Foreign Service Associates Proposal?

NEUMANN: Oh yes, I said “Liaison.” I meant Foreign Service Associates.

Q: It has been shelved, because of financial problems supposedly, but I think there were probably more problems with it, too.

NEUMANN: But I could see where that could be an assistance to a spouse. I still don't quite see how a spouse of a Chief of Mission could be reimbursed, do you?

Q: I do, and I think she should be.

NEUMANN: You've been both, how would...?

Q: ...in today's world, she should be...

NEUMANN: But how?

Q: ...If she is participating. Now, if she's skipping out and, you know, appearing maybe every three months and trailing her fur coat through the airport or something, as I've heard some do, that's not in the spirit of the Foreign Service. But no, if she is truly contributing her time to the Foreign Service, compensation should be considered almost as if...like they do in Sweden...

NEUMANN: ...Auxiliary assistance?

Q: What do you call it when you can't work? Unemployment compensation. If you can't work, in this case, you might be giving up a career or a job in order to accompany your husband overseas to do that work, you are compensated for having to give up your income or your career continuity.

NEUMANN: Well, how would you do that for the spouse of a chief of mission?

Q: Well, I think I would give her a stipend, a set amount as unemployment compensation, that is her very own...

NEUMANN: I see.

Q: She has to be there, and as long as she is being a hostess and it's taking her time away from what she might want to do...

NEUMANN: Yes, oh yes.

Q: ...but she's doing it, then I think she is due something. She should have some sort of recognition. And in today's society, I'm afraid compensation is It. Otherwise, without the compensation, she is not a part of the Foreign Service anymore. And I think it's a shame when you see the Ambassador's wife giving up something that she might want to do, because she is still needed and usually does not have the freedom of choice that others do. Of course, there are still those who like the work, but more and more we will begin to see ambassadors' wives who must give up careers or income in order to accompany their husbands abroad.

She is still needed, however, to pull things together in a way, at least to care about the people in the community. And it's a shame when she has to give up her interests, while the other women are out working for pay or are doing their own thing as we had in Malta. I remember I encouraged a younger communicator's wife to continue her singing career. I introduced her to an operatic star, and she even began making a little money.

NEUMANN: Nice.

Q: And I was happy to do that, but I had a heartache myself, because I wanted to write.

NEUMANN: And you didn't have the time.

Q: There was no time. And if I ever did not show up somewhere, the Maltese would always say, “Where were you? Were you sick? What was the matter?”

NEUMANN: Oh yes.

Q: It would not have worked for me to “drop out.”

NEUMANN: No, no.

Q: You have used the word, “duty”, and I think our generation had that sense of duty and responsibility, but today I feel the only way this type of work can be recognized as a worthwhile thing to do is through compensation.

NEUMANN: And how is one going to get that through Congress?

Q: Well, we probably never will, and so I'm glad my husband has retired (laughs), because I don't have to worry about it anymore.

NEUMANN: (laughs)

Q: But I think women for their own self-esteem then have to really drop the role. And that's a shame.

NEUMANN: The Japanese pay the husband an additional amount of money for the wife, as long as she is at post. When she's on home leave, he doesn't get that additional money. Presumably he turns it over to her, but at least they both have more

Q: Yes. So you have changed your views, but you have not totally swung...?

NEUMANN: No, I'm not totally swung over.

Q: You're not totally convinced.

NEUMANN: No.

Q: Well, I know that it's a very complicated thing and, as you say, it'll never happen.

NEUMANN: On the other hand, the Department does give a great deal more assistance to incoming spouses than it used to. A great deal more training than it used to give.

Q: But, you see, I think that's wrong.

NEUMANN: Why?

Q: To tell you by the official policy that you are free of responsibilities to your husband's career, for instance, and then hand you a large tome on how the Department expects you to carry out the non-recognized, non-compensated role.

NEUMANN: But you gets lots of recognition.

Q: Well, from where?

NEUMANN: You may not get compensation, but you get lots of recognition.

Q: From where?

NEUMANN: From the people with whom you work, if you do a good job, from the host country.

Q: I'm playing the Devil's Advocate with you here, Marlen, but there's very little for a resume, and when you come back home, as you know, no one cares what good works you did abroad.

NEUMANN: Well, as far as that goes, ambassadors don't get much recognition when they get home. They've been big frogs in small puddles out of the country and they come back and they're little frogs in big puddles.

Q: But they do. They get their commendations, their promotions, their new posts up the ladder, their raises.

Anyway, as I say, I shouldn't get into this interview so much (laughs). I wanted to ask you, too, what activities you entered into besides the representational entertaining, because I feel what you did was formidable, and here perhaps in this interview, you will get some recognition for your work.

NEUMANN: One of the activities in which I was immediately involved was the Diplomatic Wives Organization, which was made up of the wife of each ambassador in that country. We were in Kabul nearly seven years, so in the six and some point years that we were there, I was President of the Diplomatic Wives Organization, I was Treasurer, I was Secretary and had various jobs and enjoyed them all. And that led me into several different kinds of activities.

For instance, we raised money to build a school for girls outside the town of Istalif and we all went up to Istalif to lay the cornerstone of the girls school. You were with me when we did that. And we raised money to build a school outside Kabul, too. I don't know whether that ever flourished or not, but I remember that we started one in the district sort of north and east of the Embassy, out in a fairly empty part of town where they needed a school.

Another activity that because I was in the Diplomatic Wives Organization, Dr. Aziz Seraj came to our group to ask what could be done for cripples. He was particularly concerned about people who had to crawl around on their knees, because there was no other way for them to beg, who wore leather pads on their knees in the winter. Dirt and gravel and snow would get in between the pad and the knee, so he was really concerned. In the Diplomatic Wives group we formed a separate group called, the Afghan Society for the Rehabilitation of the Physically Handicapped (ASRPH). Mary MacMakin, a nurse who was there, helped us a great deal, and we had Afghan and foreign board members.

Q: Is it Mary MacMakin or Mary Eakin?

NEUMANN: No, Mary MacMakin. She's in California now, but she was resident there for a long time and she stayed after the Russians came, for awhile, until she just couldn't take it anymore.

Q: Oh, I know. There was a Mary Eakin in Pakistan, and the one I remember in Afghanistan was Evelyn Craig.

NEUMANN: Oh yes.

Q: She did a lot of that kind of welfare work.

NEUMANN: Yes. Evelyn did, too, that's right. And Mary was not there for awhile.

Q: MacMakin?

NEUMANN: Mary M-a-c-M-a-k-i-n. And so, to try and make it in brief, we raised money among Afghans and foreigners. We found three young Afghans whom we could send to Tehran to be trained as a team in rehabilitation work in one year where it normally takes three years to train a single individual. And we sent them to the Red Lion and Crescent Society in Tehran, which had a training school, to learn how to make braces and so on that would be simple enough for Afghan villagers and shepherds and farmers to wear. Somebody wanted us to use battery operated something or other from Japan, and we pointed out that a shepherd could not come in from the hills to get a new battery. These three young men who were trained, we raised money to pay their stipends. They came back, and an orthopedic center was opened in Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital, where the three young men could work. Of course, there were always problems. They had to be drafted into the Army, and people were jealous and so forth, but it was a real effort.

Also, the wife of the Iranian Ambassador, Marie Farougi, who now lives here in town, too...Marie talked with the wife of the Shah (Farah Diba), and they were able to have mobile wheelchairs built which then were sent into Kabul as a gift of the Iranian government. Then ASRPH bought more of them so that the people who had been down on the ground could now be in mobile wheelchairs.

Then we ran into a funny circumstance, and that was [that] one of the families of one of these people came, wanted to take the wheelchair away, because the man couldn't beg anymore in his wheelchair. That was depriving the family of money. Then somebody in our group invented a tray that could be fastened on to the front of the wheelchair, so that the

man could have a tray where he would have cigarettes or pencils or something to sell. He could again raise money for his family. It's funny. One doesn't expect this kind of reaction.

Q: That was ASRPH. Wasn't there a story of a little boy who fell on an electric wire and had to have some prosthesis that you got him?

NEUMANN: Yes, that was also part of ASRPH. Evelyn Craig and Mary MacMakin were more involved with that than I was. Yes.

Q: Yes.

NEUMANN: We did him a prosthesis. I wonder what's happened to him in the years since.

Q: What has happened to your ASRPH?

NEUMANN: I think the whole thing is disbanded.

Q: I'm sure.

NEUMANN: And I think that the Orthopedic Center is closed, but I'm not sure. It was going on for awhile after we left. It carried on and it carded on for awhile under the Russians, but of course, I've heard nothing since then.

Q: I want to get into your reactions later concerning the Russian invasion, but first, didn't you work at the Maternity Hospital?

NEUMANN: For awhile, when I was first there, I worked at Avicenna Hospital with the American Women's Association, which had a kind of recreation room. Did you ever go over to that?

Q: I was a Candy Striper, which Evelyn Craig set up. That was a very emotional experience, because so many of the patients were terminal. They waited too long to come in from the provinces.

NEUMANN: Yes, I did that for awhile. Then I got involved in the Maternity Hospital, working there.

Q: Do you remember the name of that?

NEUMANN: Zaishgah, wasn't it? Zaishgah Maternity Hospital. Mrs. Aziz Seraj was the Assistant Director of Zaishgah. I remember one of the things that I was so pleased about toward the end of our stay there was when the Afghan people agreed that girls who had finished the ninth grade in the provinces could come and live in a dormitory at the Maternity Hospital to be trained as helpers, as midwives. And you know what a change that was, that Afghans would allow their daughters to live in a dormitory away from home! This was for ninth grade girls. That was tremendous.And another thing I got involved in through Mary Lou Miller was the American Women's Association's connection with the University of Kabul and the work that was being done there starting a dormitory for girl students and how that started in one building the first year. It worked, and then they cut a doorway through the courtyard wall and added another building and so forth.

Q: Mary Lou Miller's husband was from Indiana University — the contract group?

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: And of course...

NEUMANN: Oh! And then, CARE Medico. Remember the Diplomatic Wives raised money to buy a double-sided tent for Care Medico, a huge tent that could be used when NOOR, the National Organization for Ophthalmological Research, which was a British group, went on one of its periodic medical trips outside Kabul. We bought them a great big tent, and

then they invited us to go on one of their trips. They would go out in the country and spend a week seeing patients from the villages all around.

Q: NOOR was British?

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: I believe there were some Americans there, too.

NEUMANN: Oh, sure, there were. I think it was basically a British organization.

Q: Because we had one of our bachas' [servant's] children, twin boys, who had been born with a congenital eye defect where their eyelids were closed.

NEUMANN: Oh?

Q: And we had a party where we had the servants' children come to play blind man's bluff. We didn't realize that they would come in like that. We thought maybe they had glaucoma, which was very common.

NEUMANN: Very prevalent, yes.

Q: So we had a separate blindfold to put around their eyes, but later I got them into the hospital, but it took a lot of pushing because Hashem, their father, was very superstitious and worried that they would die or something. I remember this American doctor said, "I'll just take a little tuck in the eye lids and it will open their eyes." And I said, "Is there any concern that you will take too big a tuck and the eyes will never be able to close?" (laughs) He said, "Yes, but we are able, we've gotten very adjusted to doing this operation."

At any rate, 'Id [Islamic holiday] came around, and Hashem called me into the kitchen and here were these twins in their 'Id outfits, all spit and polish for the Memsahib...

NEUMANN: Oh, darling.

Q: And their eyes were open for the first time in nine years! (laughs) It was a thrilling thing, you know.

NEUMANN: Oh yes.

Q: I also wondered about the school that you mentioned in Istalif. Wasn't that a project of June Martin's?

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: We in the American Women's Club had stipulated, I believe, that it be a school for girls?

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: And wasn't it true that the bridge washed out, and the village elders got together to spend our money...?

NEUMANN: Yes, on repairing the bridge.

Q: ...on repairing the bridge, which was their only way to get to market.

NEUMANN: Yes, instead of finishing the school.

Q: Yes. But when they did finish it, they gave it over to the boys, I believe.

NEUMANN: Did they?

Q: I think so.

NEUMANN: I hate to admit it, I didn't follow through to see what they had done.

Q: And then, June Martin, who had worked so hard on it, I remember she was dying of cancer, and I called someone in the Afghan Embassy...I don't remember who, to see if they could name the school The June Martin School so I could tell June. And we did tell her just before she died, but, of course, it's probably been laid waste by now.

NEUMANN: It may have been bombed to nothing by now, because Istalif has been attacked. I still have your painting of Istalif.

Q: Yes? The one that was a cover on the Foreign Service Journal?

NEUMANN: Yes it was, and I have the painting right here in the house. I look at it every now and then and I think, “I'm glad Penne painted that when she did, because it probably doesn't loolike that now.”

Q: No, never again.

NEUMANN: Oh, just let me finish about the group of diplomatic wives that went to the Panshir Valley to visit the tent that was set up. I even watched a cataract operation, and I brought home the cataract to show to my husband. I kept it for awhile: just sort of a cloudy piece of round plastic that came out. Now I'm looking forward to having a cataract operation myself.

Q: Well, if it's any comfort, Marlen, when we were in Pakistan, I used to accompany Dr. Holland, who was famous in that area for his eye clinic, and we'd go out on the desert where he'd set up a tent. The people would come in from miles around. I'm sure it's the same kind of thing. All day, he'd do cataract operations, and by the end of the day, under that tent, at the bottom of his feet, it was like fish scales all over the floor.

NEUMANN: Yes, fish scales is a very good description.

Q: And I was told it was a relatively simple operation.

NEUMANN: I was so surprised that an elderly man came in and lay down on the table. It was sort of a high table, and the only way to get up on it was a stone to stand on. There was no generator, so they had their own portable generator. They had a flashlight tied to a lamp: really very primitive conditions under which they worked. They were working in a village house, and then the tent was for the patients. Their role wathat they looked and inspected eyes all morning and they did cataract operations all afternoon. Whoever had the operation had to bring a cot on which he could lie afterwards for three days. He had to pay 30 Afghanis, which was a dollar, maybe, for the service.

Q: Which might be a lot for him.

NEUMANN: Of course, of course. And those were the days when in America people were still lying motionless with sandbags on each side of their heads so they couldn't move after a cataract operation. And the man came in and had an operation and then they helped him out. He walked to the bed where he was to lie down. I was amazed. Now, I understand cataract operations are done in the clinic, in the hospital, but they're done on an outpatient basis. One goes in in the morning and goes home at night.

Q: We could learn a lot from the stoicism that we see in these countries. I think we sort of get reliant on our drugs and so forth. I remember hygiene was always a worry to me, and now, today, I see my little granddaughter with no playpen. She crawls everywhere in their house like a commando on her elbows, into the dog's dish, the floor, tasting everything she finds. (laughs) But I'll bet she's immune to everything!

NEUMANN: (laughs) You know, we've been talking with such pleasure about Afghanistan and we're thinking about all the nice things we remember. Just for the record, we ought to say that there was a darker side to Afghanistan.

Q: Absolutely.

NEUMANN: The nurse who was shot at Kargha Lake.

Q: The American nurse?

NEUMANN: The American nurse, yes.

Q: Doris Niddle. She was a good nurse, particularly at giving shots. The children never felt it. They just loved to go to Doris, so they called her Doris Needle.

NEUMANN: Oh, cute.

Q: Yes. She was murdered, they thought by a servant who had come back to her house and put a mattress over her, smothered her. But I don't think they really ever found out who did it.

NEUMANN: No, but then there was another nurse who was shot. Remember the two nurses?

Q: Oh yes, up at the Lake, yes. That was not Doris.

NEUMANN: No.

Q: Later, there were two of them, I believe, sitting in a car up at Kargha Lake.

NEUMANN: And they were there for a prayer session. Somebody came along — I don't think anyone ever found out who did it — and shot one of them. And then there were the two Americans who were walking across Asia: two brothers, I believe.

Q: Missionaries of some sort?

NEUMANN: Well, not exactly. They were walking to prove something. They had a cart and they came through Kabul. They were warned not to camp in the Kabul Gorge unless they camped close to a police station. Our doctor, Paquita Reyes...

Q: The little Filipino doctor, yes.

NEUMANN: She saw them that day going through the Gorge and she warned them again, but they did...they camped all by themselves. Evidently it was near someplace where smugglers were transporting goods. Nobody quite knows the whole story, but one of them was killed. They attacked or they were attacked, I don't know which. So there was always danger.On the other hand, I was driving a friend down the Kabul Gorge alone in my car one day and had a flat tire. I stopped, and a whole group of Afghans came by and stopped and fixed the tire for me. I had no problem at all. But was it with you or was it with the Lewises that we drove to Latabad and went over the old road?

Q: Well, we took a trip with you over an old, upper pass where the vultures were, remember that?

NEUMANN: Yes, but was that the trip where we had two or three flat tires?

Q: Yes.

NEUMANN: And they fixed one, but the second they had to run the car up over the rim in order to break the tire lose. Then they had to patch it, because they didn't have another spare. Dark came on, and it was a little risky being out there.

Q: Yes.

NEUMANN: Nothing happened to us.

Q: No, I remember that well. And also going up to B_mi_n, we had the Embassy carryall. We had an excellent driver, Anwar. He always said "tree turly" instead of three thirty, which made us laugh. (End tape 1, side A)

We were just talking, Marlen, about trips we had taken in Afghanistan,

NEUMANN: And you were telling me about going up to B_mi_n. [B_mi_n is an ancient village located in a valley surrounded by the Hindu Kush mountains. Northwest of Kabul, it is reached today by a nine-hour drive over unpaved, treacherous roads. Prior to the coming of Islam, B_mi_n was a major Buddhist center, where monks lived in caves. Large Buddhas are carved in the cliffs of the B_mi_n valley, After his conquest of the lands north of the Amu Darya in the 13th Century, Genghis Khan moved into Bactria, ravaging that prosperous territory to a degree from which it has never recovered. After Mutukin, the conqueror's favorite grandson, was killed under the walls of B_mi_n, the enraged Mongol destroyed every person in the valley surrounding it. The large Buddhas, though greatly marred, remain as testimony to the grandeur of the Buddhist civilization.]

Q: Yes...going off to B_mi_n in an Embassy carryall. It was usually a very good idea to travel with a caravan of cars, but we had a very good Afghan driver, Anwar, who assured us that he had driven Averell Harriman over some of those passes and that we would survive.

At any rate, at one point, we were tooling along this highway, and the koochi [nomads] came very close to the road with their flocks of sheep. They had a great big dog. Remember those big dogs?

NEUMANN: Oh, the mastiffs! Enormous dogs!

Q: And that dog just stood in the middle of the road and then came toward us.

NEUMANN: Oh boy.

Q: I mean, he was just determined. You could not honk your horn or do anything. And we careened around and around and around trying to avoid him, but Anwar hit him head on! That, by the way, was on a trip to Herat on this straightaway. Bruce wanted to get out to pay the koochi for the dog, but Anwar, seeing the koochi chieftain running down the road shaking his fist at us, said, "No, Sahib. They don't want your money. They want your hide! So, reluctantly, we got in the carryall and sped away.

But on the B_mi_n trip, which is very, very rugged, I remember, first of all, that the whole gear stick came out of the car.

NEUMANN: Good gracious.

Q: And I was so afraid we'd have to fly back to Kabul in that awful, little Canadian otter plane, you know, (laughs), that we'd get pulled down in those air drafts in the mountains.

NEUMANN: Oh my.

Q: But somehow, Anwar...with a hairpin or something...

NEUMANN:...got the gearshift fixed.

Q: Yes. Then we came out on the road and hit some rock, and there was a big hole in the radiator.

NEUMANN: Oh my.

Q: And he disappeared for a half an hour and said, "Never mind, I'll think of something." He came back and he stuffed apricots from a tree into this hole, and it worked! It plugged up the hole!

NEUMANN: Well, sure. When the swimming pool, which was built at the Residence during our time — and you might say that was something we did that was different — when the

swimming pool was built, a leak developed. The men came to fix it, and they used sheep's wool and raisins, which they ground into a pulp, and two or three other local commodities which made a pasty kind of thing, and they stuffed the leak.

This reminds me of another activity that I got going there, and that was for teenagers in the summer, because we found that many teenagers came back from college and were at loose ends all summer. There were other teens who lived there who didn't go off to college, so Tom Gouttierre and Asia Foundation and AID worked up a kind of committee. We polled all the different American branches there: what jobs would be possible for teenagers in the summer. Then we had to get this information out to the families by about Easter, so they could get the information back to their teenagers in America and have them apply for jobs. And we did. We worked out summer employment for a goodly number of the young Americans there.

Q: I think that's fantastic. I wonder, too, didn't you try to do something about Babur's Tomb?

NEUMANN: Oh yes. Yes, I did. Fancy your remembering that.

Q: Describe where it was and what you had in mind.

NEUMANN: Babur, who was the first Moghul Emperor who came into Afghanistan across the Oxus from Turkistan and then led his people into India and who became the first great Moghul Emperor of India, is buried in a very simple tomb on a hillside in Kabul. It is on a hillside that faces away from where the Embassy is. It's on the other side of town. And around it, next to it, there was a great empty pool, a huge thing. It'd be a marvelous swimming pool, practically Olympic size. His wives are buried there and one or two other members of his family.

There is a charming small mosque of white marble put up by Shah Jehan in honor of Babur, then great gardens stretching from a little bit behind the Tomb, and then down the

hillside with a great wall around it. The gardens are very much neglected. Many of the flowerbeds are dried up. The watercourse is dried up. There was a pavilion below Babur's Tomb, and I'd heard some charming stories about Afghan government life taking place in that pavilion. Then below the pavilion, there were watercourses in typical Moghul fashion.

I thought it was such a shame that it was in such a state of disrepair and I wanted to encourage Afghans to do something about it. I wanted them to form a Friends of Babur's Garden organization and get involved. I did do some research. I've sort of forgotten now what I did. I did some research on revitalizing it, and then there was somebody else who came — an architect, a woman architect — who came and did work. I understood that after I left, quite a bit was done to dig up some of the old watercourses and put them into operation and reestablish the plan the way it had been in Babur's time.

Q: But now, who knows?

NEUMANN: But now, who knows?

Q: It's incredible. Can you think of anything else that we did that was not representational entertaining, but was this kind of...what I call people-to-people diplomacy...that only the women can do?

NEUMANN: That's right.

Q: We had our gift shop, do you recall that?

NEUMANN: Oh yes, that was tremendous and that was people-to-people diplomacy, because those who ran the gift shop were training Afghan workers to do good quality work: Afghan women to do good embroidery on good quality cloth, for instance.

Q: When I left the management of that in 1971, we had over 100 Afghan vendors coming in with their woodwork, marble, lapis, embroidery work.

NEUMANN: Really?

Q: And one of them, the marble man, that made the little pendants...the apple pendants...

NEUMANN: Yes, and I have some of the boxes. [points to three marble boxes on a bookshelf]

Q: Yes, oh yes, and these beautiful boxes that we designed helped set him up in business so that he had three shops in town by the time I left.

NEUMANN: For heaven's sake.

Q: And I wonder today if those beautiful boxes, which were worthy of Tiffany's, are not in Leningrad or something.

NEUMANN: Yes, but then they may have been bought and he may still have his shops; who knows? He may still be going on. The people-to-people diplomacy may have worked.

Q: The thing I'm getting at is we did these things because we wanted to, but also there was the feeling that this was expected in a way. There was nothing else to do either. [The Gift Shop was disbanded several years after Laingen left, but not because the Afghan Government or American Embassy objected to it, but because the American women wanted to be paid for managing it.]

NEUMANN: Well, the charity bazaars were expected.

Q: Oh yes, we did that.

NEUMANN: We organized those, and all the diplomats had a booth, each country had a booth. A lot of work went into that, getting stuff for it from the United States. [Marlen Neumann was very active with the bazaars and kindly offered the Residence garage to the women in the community for storing their goods.]

Q: Oh, I know. I even chaired it one year. And do you remember we wanted to call it an American Country Store (similar to a general store in New England)?

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: And we had to put a sign up in Farsi or Pushtu above the stall, but we had the idea of an American country store?

NEUMANN: But it didn't exactly work...

Q: ..because the way that they translated it was “The People's Store”... (laughs)

NEUMANN: (laughs) Oh yes!

Q: ...as though it was representing a communist country?

NEUMANN: (laughs) Oh dear, yes.

Q: Remember the hair spray?

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: It was the most popular item we sold.

NEUMANN: Yes, it was the most popular. I'd forgotten.

Q: (laughs) We probably ruined the ozone layer over Afghanistan!

NEUMANN: Oh dear. (laughs)

I'm thinking of the Fourth of July celebrations, too, at the Embassy Residence where Robert and I always carried that on with very large attendance, because we felt this was one way by which people in the lower echelons of government could have their

work recognized: the customs officials at the airport who worked well with our American officials and helped get things in the country without long delays, various people who wouldn't normally get invited to the Residence. All could be invited for the Fourth of July celebrations.

Q: That was good.

NEUMANN: We'd invite about 1500 people and about 700 people came, and naturally not all the Americans could take part in that. There wouldn't have been room for anybody else. So, then there was a lot of feeling among Americans that they were excluded from the reception. That was when Americans all got together, and we organized our own Fourth of July party at Neumann field.

Q: Neumann Field was a baseball lot, an empty lot next to the American Embassy, and we dubbed it "Neumann Field" in honor of Robert.

And you had newcomer coffees. I remember them.

NEUMANN: Oh yes.

Q: I don't know if that was an innovation of yours, but it certainly was very helpful, I think, to people who came.

NEUMANN: Good. I had a party, reception, a coffee about once a month — oh, maybe ten times a year — for newcomers and for those who were leaving. Remember? We had different colored ribbons that people would pin on: one color if you were a newcomer and one if you were departing. And we always invited any friends of Americans to come or tourists who happened to be in town. We'd invite them also to come to these affairs.

Then, Peace Corps, too. They'd come in from the country. Then we had a time adding enough food, because these receptions were always paid for out of our own pocket, because receptions for Americans couldn't be paid for out of the representational

allowance. You had to have foreigners at those. So I covered these, and then the Peace Corps would come and, my goodness, here was good American food! Serajuddin, the head bearer, would get so upset, because they ate so much. Then the next party we tried having no plates, and you had to just take finger food from the dining room table, but they managed to eat a lot anyway. Our servants got more upset about it almost than I did, but those Peace Corps volunteers were very nice.

Q: They were.

NEUMANN: And then, another thing we did — I don't know whether it had been done before or not — we had Thanksgiving celebrations, Thanksgiving morning, using the Marines. That was something my husband insisted on, because it was a national celebration, and we had the Marines there.

Q: Perhaps had more Americans had the Marines to their homes in Moscow, they might not have had so much trouble there.

NEUMANN: Yes, right, right.

Q: We had a wonderful Marine contingent in Kabul.

NEUMANN: Oh yes. We had Easter Sunday service, too, in Kabul.

Q: Yes, Easter Sunrise Service.

NEUMANN: Yes, remember it?

Q: I do, I do.

NEUMANN: At dawn Easter Sunday for all Americans.

Q: I remember Lou Mitchell, the Peace Corps Director, giving the sermon. He was a former minister.

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: I remember a wedding you had at the Residence.

NEUMANN: Yes, and we had a wedding reception another time.

Q: I remember, because I loaned a beautiful part of an organdy lace wedding gown for the altar scarf.

NEUMANN:(laughs)

Q: (laughs) Wasn't that innovative?

NEUMANN: I remember. Oh dear. We didn't have those things in Morocco, because it wasn't as isolated a post and, of course, we were not in Saudi Arabia long enough. But in Saudi Arabia, even in the three months we were there, I was able to do two things with the American community that the American community asked for. The singles needed a place where they could meet, and it was very difficult for an American man and an American woman to go out anywhere in Jeddah to eat or to meet. There were no movies you could go to and no dance halls or or anything.

We were trying to set up, get a room built next to the little snack bar where there could be a sort of section. That I didn't finish before I left, but what we did manage to do was to blacktop the area next to the Marine House so that it wouldn't be sand and so that they could have basketball and volleyball next to the Marine House.

When you spoke of Marines, that was something we did. And one of the very first things we did in Jeddah that apparently astonished Americans was that we were asked if we would go to the bowling tournament to award the prizes. Of course, we were delighted. It

gave us a chance to see something of what Americans were doing in Jeddah. We went and we did award the prizes, so that was at least something different. And the Marines were invited.

Q: That's good. Well, I wanted to get back, while we still have time on this tape, to 1972 when the Directive did come in. I had left Afghanistan, so I wasn't there under, shall we say, the new regime that was coming in...the new ideas. Do you remember it as a "before and after" kind of thing? Did people, spouses, come into this Wives Advisory Council meeting and suddenly say, "Thank goodness, I've always wanted this freedom?" Or what was the reaction?

NEUMANN: Penne, it's strange. There really wasn't that much difference. Those who had been actively involved in doing things kept on doing them. Those who didn't want to kept on not doing them. There really didn't seem to be that much difference.

I was, in a sense, unaware of the ramifications of what would develop as you discovered later, but at that time, it didn't really bother me so much.

Q: I do remember myself a few individuals who were trying to make a statement of their individuality, their independence from the system. One was Lenore Cooley, if you recall, who was the wife of a young, new officer, and they had a little boy, as I recall.

NEUMANN: And their marriage wasn't very firm.

Q: No, they have since divorced.

NEUMANN: Not very stable, yes.

Q: But at that time she wanted to work, you remember, at a local Afghan newspaper. And there was some question about whether she really could do this. I think she did, but it was

strictly on the proviso that she only edit or something. She could not write or there was some stipulation. That was kind of a new thing...

NEUMANN: A new thing...

Q: ...for her to come in...

NEUMANN: ...and want to do that.

Q: And then I remember Beth Jones, who was a Foreign Service officer...

NEUMANN: Yes, yes.

Q: ...who was very much adamant to maintain her individuality.

NEUMANN: And I remember that, because I had not really ever thought about the distinction between a woman officer and a woman spouse and had sort of expected Beth to come and call on me. Then it was explained. I don't know whether Beth explained it or somebody else...

Q: I'm sure she did. (laughs)

NEUMANN: ...that Beth was an officer and, therefore, she had to call on the Ambassador, but not on me. That was all right when I understood it. I hadn't thought about it before.

Q: Yes. But I remember we had her in our guesthouse for a few months.

NEUMANN: So you were closer to some of her problems.

Q: Well, the thing was that I was only interested in keeping her comfortable and happy, because until she found a house, our guesthouse became her home.

NEUMANN: Yes, that's right.

Q: And so I had Feroz, our head bearer you remember, one day take her out some lunch on a tray or maybe it was breakfast, but she was absolutely furious.

NEUMANN: Why?

Q: Because she said, "I'm a grown woman and a Foreign Service officer. I can get up and get my own breakfast. I don't need servants waiting on me." But the thing was, she relayed this message to the Embassy, not to me, and I was made to feel like a spoiled woman having all those servants.

NEUMANN: Oh my goodness.

Q: I had this staff at my disposal. Maybe she expected me to bring the tray, I don't know. (laughs)

NEUMANN: (laughs) No.

Q: But she was going through something, as I say, a stage of trying to assert herself as a woman officer, but I was made to feel that my traditional behavior was somehow wrong.

NEUMANN: Yes. So there were people who were going through stages.

Q: And I remember Ann Mitchell, who is a good friend of ours, the Peace Corps Director's wife...

NEUMANN: Lou Mitchell's wife, yes.

Q: ...who was a teacher. She wanted to teach at AISK, but there was some question as to whether she would have time as the Peace Corps Director's wife...

NEUMANN: ...to do that.

Q: ...to do that. She said, “I came out here on the proviso that I would teach. She always tells this funny story that she had taught mentally retarded children. In fact, she had had one put a gun to her head at some point...in the States.

NEUMANN: Goodness! I never heard that story.

Q: And when I was introducing her to a group of mothers, I said, “Ann has taught mentally retarded children in the States, so I think she is very well qualified to teach our children. (laughs)

NEUMANN: (laughs)

Q: And she never got over that, how ingenuous I was. (laughs) Well, anyway, there were these few signs in 1971...

NEUMANN: There were beginning signs. There were, yes. And by the time I got to Jeddah, which was 1981, 90% of the American spouses at the Embassy were working...

Q: Yes.

NEUMANN:...were employed. And this has made a difference in what can be done and not done in community life in relation to the host country, as was pointed out in a recent letter to the AAFSW News by a woman who said that her host country friends had come up to her and said, “We miss the Americans.” And it turned out that the American women had been the ones who went to the softball games and sold hot dogs and did a whole lot of things like that that they're not doing now.

Q: Exactly.

NEUMANN: Of course, my son out in California notices this, too, at softball games, that the wives are not there. The husbands are pitching in to do some of the work.

Q: I think we've become accustomed to the system today and we can understand it better. But there is still a loose end, and it has to do with the Chief of Mission's wife, in my mind. She is today really left holding the representational bag alone, in a way.

NEUMANN: Well, she has to do a great deal of cajoling of people to be able to do her work. She can't go to other spouses and say, “We have a Congressional delegation coming and will you help me to take the six Congressmen's wives around to go shopping and to see the museums and so forth?” She can try, but she no longer has any authority to order it.

Q: No, I don't think that's the problem.

NEUMANN: You don't think that? You don't see that?

Q: I look at it from a different angle. The problem I see is that she herself is not allowed to be employed by the Embassy, and under very rare circumstances, can be employed in any capacity at post...

NEUMANN: Well, I haven't seen this at all.

Q: ...because as the Ambassador's wife, there would be conflict of interest. No one would dare write her efficiency report. But that is not in the spirit of the 1972 Policy Directive. She should be as free as anyone else to apply for a job, if that's what she wants to do. But she really is not free...and that is why I think she should be compensated if she does the work.

NEUMANN: I haven't run into any of that at all, so that may be why I don't feel as strongly about it as you do.

Q: You feel you could have worked in Jeddah or Morocco?

NEUMANN: Well l did.

Q: And were paid for it?

NEUMANN: I wasn't paid for what I did, but I worked in Jeddah, and I was accepted. I worked quietly. I worked as asked. In one case, I worked a little too quietly, so it didn't get done, because my husband wanted us to do something about pepping up the area in Jeddah where the Saudis come into get their visas. He said it almost looked like a prison. It was so blank and bare. I got a committee together to help me with it. The committee spent an awful lot of time making up its mind. So we didn't get as many improvements as I would have liked if I'd just pitched in and done it. So you might say I was a little bit handicapped there.

Q: I think the Department of State is very fortunate that there are still wives of chiefs of mission, such as yourself, who are willing to work for the U.S. Government for nothing.

NEUMANN: Now one whole area we haven't mentioned of representational duties that ambassadors' wives still have to do are all the calls that she is expected to make on all the other ambassadors' wives at a mission. And then the return calls that she's expected to receive and the farewell calls she has to make. This all takes time and energy.

Q: But, you see, what if she didn't do it? According to the official policy, she is not expected to do this. Your comments just point up the lack of realism in the policy vis-a-vis chief of missions' wives.

NEUMANN: Well, it would be her loss. She wouldn't meet the other wives.

Q: Maybe, but maybe not. You see, I think she would be made to feel that it's her loss or that she should do it. It's really more the Foreign Service's loss when she doesn't do it. I know she definitely cannot be a CLO, for example. She may be perfectly capable, better qualified than anyone else in the community to do the CLO job, but she cannot because

she's the Ambassador's wife. I think there is an inequity there that is not in the spirit of the Directive.

NEUMANN: But isn't the world full of inequities?

Q: Of course (laughs), but that doesn't mean we shouldn't fight it. Some of us who went along with the thing happily in the spirit of the Foreign Service, because we loved the partnership, found it went sour on account of these inequities.

NEUMANN: What about Betty Atherton? Has anybody interviewed her yet?

Q: Yes, she's been interviewed.

NEUMANN: It was Betty who had an office in the Embassy, wasn't it?

Q: Yes.

NEUMANN: She wasn't a CLO, but she had her own office in the Embassy, so she did manage to be there. Much of the time I'm not sure that I would have wanted to be a CLO, because I think it would have tied me down too much.

Q: I think what we're talking about here is a spirit of freedom for all women. Do we have it or don't we? I really don't feel that an ambassador's wife should be any different from anyone else if that's the policy.

NEUMANN: Perhaps, and yet, in the very position and all, it makes her different.

Q: It's the difference I think that should be recognized by the Department of State. Well, let's see, we've talked about compensation. Do you think the changes concerning Foreign Service spouses has had any impact on the Foreign Service itself?

NEUMANN: I do think it has had an impact on the Foreign Service.

Q: As you said, so many were working in Jeddah.

NEUMANN: And in a sense that, I think, more Foreign Service officers, be they male or female, go to posts alone for periods of time, because the spouse, female or male, is working at home and doesn't want to break the career at home. Or the Foreign Service officer, male or female, goes for a period of time without the spouse, who's winding up a career or winding up graduate study, so in that sense I think it has affected Foreign Service life. It has affected it, too, in that Foreign Service officers aren't able to give the foreign country a sense of family life as they used to. The entertaining, obviously, has to be somewhat different when one is alone than when one is a pair. There are a lot of side things that wives in particular have done that they aren't able to do now, like the group in Jeddah who are all working. They couldn't do as much to smooth the edges of life in a foreign country.

Q: So, in other words, you say that's positive or negative or neither or both?

NEUMANN: It's both. Where we as spouses used to have a welcome kit and prepare sheets and towels, kitchenware and so forth, for newcomers to carry on until their air freight and sea freight arrived, and we took care of it, now the CLO takes care of something like that.

Q: And which the Administrative section should have done to begin with.

NEUMANN: A lot of places...a lot of activities that were handled by spouses on an ad hoc basis...activities which sometimes fell through when certain spouses who'd worked hard and nobody else filled in, those activities are now carried on, more or less, well by CLOs. So a good deal has gone over to the paid employee now.

Q: Yes. Were we more idealistic in the sense that we really thought in the fifties that we were spreading a good American image and that we were a part of it?

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: Perhaps it was into the sixties with the Kennedy's that gave us that feeling.

NEUMANN: Yes, but I had that feeling in the seventies.

Q: We felt we were in the Foreign Service ourselves.

NEUMANN: And you wouldn't feel that now?

Q: No, definitely not.

NEUMANN: I'd have to ask my daughter-in-law about that, because Ron is Deputy Chief of Mission in Abu Dhabi, and she is out there. She is taking a very active part in representation, but she's also recently taken on a position teaching in the American school there. I haven't talked with her about that particular aspect of her work.

Q: Of course, there are some jobs like the teaching and the nursing, which are portable careers, that really women have done right along and have not been frowned upon. But that is not representational work of the type of people-to-people diplomacy we've been talking about where you feel you're doing a job and are a part of the Foreign Service. The difficulty comes today if you have a high-powered career, such as an attorney or in marketing, that you just can't do overseas. I doubt many of these women feel they are in the Foreign Service, because they have their own careers.

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: Then the real tension begins...

NEUMANN: That's right.

Q: ...of being thrown into this position which does not have the idea that you are a part of spreading a good American image.

NEUMANN: But I think neither you nor I are really qualified to answer that now. We're too much out of the mainstream.

Q: Yes. We're outdated.

NEUMANN: I think we'd have to talk to some of the younger ones to find out their reactions and how they feel about it.

Q: Well, of course, we did that in 1985 with the AAFSW Forum Report on the Role of Spouses in the Foreign Service. But if you mention someone as saying, "What's happened to the Americans? We don't see them"...

NEUMANN: That's a negative in my opinion.

Q: Well, it is. It is happening. It's interesting that the women had that contact on the outside. The men were in the office most of the day and they went to parties at night, but it was the women who had that intimate contact.

NEUMANN: Yes, yes.

Q: It is important.

NEUMANN: Sure it is. Robert, for instance, would ask me, "What are the women doing? What were the women thinking?" When there was some political problem, he'd want that aspect of the situation, and only the women could get it from the women, so to speak.

Q: Particularly in a place like Saudi Arabia, I would think. I also think it's important that the Ambassador and his wife don't isolate themselves from their own people. Some tend to do that.

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: I don't feel you ever did.

NEUMANN: No, I think we never did.

Q: You had too many contacts out in the community, so you pretty much knew what was going on all the time.

NEUMANN: Yes, and I relied very much on the wife of the DCM to help me keep informed, too. (laughs)

Q: I remember. (laughs)

NEUMANN: Because there are lots of things that people won't bring to the Ambassador's wife. “Oh, you're too busy,” they say. They don't know that part of my busy-ness is knowing what their problems are.

Oh, there was an incident after you left. There were complaints about housing, and there were FSOs who said the AID people had refrigerators and they didn't, and this and that went on; that the Foreign Service didn't have, because AID was more gracious or grand or had more money or something. Somebody complained about rats in her house. There was enough real disgruntlement around the community that Sallie Lewis and I did a survey.

We told Admin that we were going to do it, so that Admin wouldn't get too fussy about our infringing on Admin's rights, but we went around and talked to all of the American families there in Kabul, with a list of questions based on all this disgruntlement. Then we came back with a report, the two of us, Sallie Lewis being, as you know, the wife of the DCM there. The basic problem really was lack of communication: that State had not explained to State people where AID people got things. There really wasn't very good

communication between the Administrative officers and FSOs or whatever in discussing needs or requirements for housing problems, and eventually...

Q: How did you iron it out though?

NEUMANN: We did iron out some of the problems simply by airing a lot of the grievances: grievances that Admin had not taken seriously. Some of the grievances could be actually solved with material benefits. Some could not be solved that way, but a better understanding could be achieved. I don't say that we were 100% perfect.

Q: As I recall though, in Afghanistan, I think the AID mission had that compound across town and they had warehouses full of furniture and equipment and had facilities that the Embassy could not begin to match.

NEUMANN: That's right.

Q: And then, of course, you remember the Deputy Director of AID, when we arrived, that house was like a Taj Mahal. I think a lot of people thought that was where some of the problem lay...

NEUMANN: Yes.

Q: ...where jealousy stirred up. But that always goes on.

NEUMANN: Oh sure.

Q: I remember in Pakistan, somebody came in and said, “You have three air conditioners and I only have two. (laughs)

NEUMANN: Sure.

Q: But I think that's another thing I remember in Afghanistan: that a communicator's wife was angry because her only refrigerator broke down. I as the DCM's wife had two. She

was told that she could not have one in the warehouse, because it was there in reserve in case the Ambassador's or the DCM's two refrigerators broke down.

NEUMANN: Oh, that would be upsetting.

Q: That's very upsetting. And it upset me, because it put me in a terrible position.

NEUMANN: Sure.

Q: So there are always some inequities.

NEUMANN: Oh yes.

Q: But today, in this more egalitarian system, perhaps some of these things are a little bit fairer.

NEUMANN: Yes. (laughs) But who knows?

Q: Who knows? Just one last thing to get on this tape. Of course, what's happened there in Afghanistan (the Russian invasion in December 1979 and the consistent attempt to destroy a whole people) is heartbreaking, particularly to those of us who served there.

NEUMANN: Oh boy, isn't it though?

Q: What has happened in your thinking about it? What have you heard of people? Most of our friends have either been killed or exiled. What has been your experience?

NEUMANN: Well, of course, the same thing in terms of Afghan friends and in terms of the servants whom we've known. It's almost impossible to get any information. I have found that big Mohammad Sultan is still working in the Residence garden, but yet I don't dare ask anybody to ask him to find out whether Serajuddin, who lived in Paghman, is all right or not, because if he starts asking, he may get into trouble. If Seraj has been involved in anything, then Mohammad Sultan would be involved in something. I know that the

Residence is still inhabited by the Charge, and I know that the tennis court and swimming pool are still there, and that part of it. Neumann Field is still there, but why the Russians haven't taken that over I don't know, but they haven't.

As far as our friends are concerned, those who are dead, we just don't know anymore, and those who have gotten out, we know a lot who are in America or Germany or Switzerland or Pakistan. I don't know how many of them will go back.

Q: That's what I wonder.

NEUMANN: We have a few friends who are working class Afghans. The others were Cabinet ministers, government ministers, and so forth. The working class ones are having a hard time fitting into America, because they have to work so much harder in America than the Afghan work ethic involved. They are finding that America is not paved with gold.

Q: But for their children?

NEUMANN: Yes, the children are fitting in. They are adjusting.

Q: And they will keep their parents here?

NEUMANN: One of my Afghan friends, whose husband was a government official and who has been back to Pakistan on business, said she doubts that they will go back, because the general trend of the refugees whom he has met has been of increased conservatism, that she feels that she is too westernized to go back to an Afghanistan that she thinks will be more conservative than it was.

Q: Sure. I would say, sucked into Iran's conservatism, too, rather than Russian Communism.

NEUMANN: Well, it's a more moderate religious tendency, but the women are more conservative in dress, in veiling, and so forth than they were. And, of course, we know

there was always a distinction between village women and city women and women of the working class and women of the government class. Always the women of the working class were less westernized, less evolved, in their clothing, but I don't know how many of the Afghans who left will ever go back. It might be very hard for them to go back, because they haven't been involved in the fighting. They're an emigr# group now.

Q: Exactly. Do you think though that the Russians will leave? It's looking that way.

NEUMANN: They're talking that way. I think they will pull out. I think there's some hard negotiating yet to do. I wish the Russians would talk with the Afghans, not necessarily on a government basis, but they could pick academicians to talk to Afghan guerilla leaders on a sort of non-official basis. After all, the Americans and the Russians talk on a non-official basis through the Dartmouth talks [semiannual talks between small groups of American and Russian specialists and former government officials. Inspired by President Eisenhower, these talks are called “Dartmouth” because the first meetings were held at Dartmouth College] and have for some time, and both sides know that the others have government relations or government positions. But yet, they speak as private individuals, so they can propose ideas to each other which don't lock their countries into the ideas. So I wish that Russians and guerrilla leaders could do some talking, because I think the guerrilla leaders have to be involved in the final decisions.

Q: But the guerrilla leaders have been so split...

NEUMANN: That's right.

Q: ...into factions.

NEUMANN: So maybe only Russian withdrawal and possibly less American aid will get them together. Maybe in the face of the fact that they're going to have to get together, maybe they will.

Q: Do you think the Afghans will bring Zahir Shah back?

NEUMANN: I don't know.

Q: I don't see that myself, not with so many of the educated and westernized people not returning.

NEUMANN: I don't know. If they did, it would be only temporarily.

Q: He'd be a real puppet?

NEUMANN: I don't think he'd come back, except if he came back knowing it was just in order to get things organized, I don't think he wants to. And I don't think he'd come in as a puppet. He wouldn't come in for the Russians.

Q: No. We always felt his son, too, was...

NEUMANN: Abdul Walli, his son-in-law?

Q: Well, that son-in-law was much more capable than the son. We always felt the son was a little bit dense upstairs.

NEUMANN: Not the one who died?

Q: Did one die?

NEUMANN: Oh yes. One fell off a balcony in Rome and was killed.

Q: Oh my goodness.

NEUMANN: No, I think that was the younger son.

Q: There was one they were always concerned about, and that was one of the reasons Daoud moved in (in 1972) because he just could not see this son inheriting the rule.

NEUMANN: Now I can't see the guerilla leaders accepting any Afghan Communist in the government, so that's a real sticking point. And yet, some of the things that the Russians have said indicate that they aren't going to insist on Communist leaders being in the new government. So there's jockeying going on there. My own feeling is that the Communists who want to live had better get out of the country, and there are already stories of fighting and murders and so on between the Parcham and the Khalq as to which is less Russian than the other.

Q: There were stories of their sending the children away to Russia and indoctrinating them away from their parents. What will happen to them?

NEUMANN: I've always had a feeling that the indoctrination might not work as well as the Russians expected it to. Some kids would get infected, but some would hold out against it.

Q: You would think they'd be so emotionally and mentally fouled up...

NEUMANN: I don't know. I can't say.

Q: How could they ever come back and find their families? I really think it has been a step by step ruination of a country. What is it? A fourth of the population has been killed off?

NEUMANN: Yes, but there are an awful lot of Afghans in the refugee camps who are going to go back.

Q: Yes, but are they...?

NEUMANN: They are the backbone of the country.

Q: Are many of them the nomads, the shepherds?

NEUMANN: No, no, no. They are villagers; lots and lots of them are villagers who had to leave their villages.

Q: Many of which have been laid waste. But there's been such a brain drain, too.

NEUMANN: Yes, but there'll be new brains coming up.

Q: To me, it's really been a holocaust.

NEUMANN: Well, it is. It's very sad. It's very sad.

Q: I wish they wouldn't make so many comparisons with Vietnam, because I don't think that it was similar in motivation. I really don't at all. I think we were there to keep the invaders out. We were not the invaders.

NEUMANN: I know. We thought we were there to keep the invaders out.

Q: Yes, we tried.

NEUMANN: Definitely, yes.

Q: I loved Afghanistan. I think we were there at the right time.

NEUMANN: Yes. We saw so much changing while we were there.

Q: Yes, yes. Do you remember the Lashkargah group down in the Helmand Valley?

NEUMANN: Yes, indeed I do. We went down there and also in Khandahar, to see the AID community there. I remember when I directed the “Barretts of Wimpole Street” for the American Women's Association, we took the whole play down to Khandahar and gave it there.

I remember going down to Lashkargah and riding out, going horseback riding there and going to see the ruins, cities, previous civilizations, and going to the Wheat Day and giving diplomas to the farmers.

Q: Yes! And the tractor races.

NEUMANN: I learned a lot about wheat going to Wheat Day.

Q: And then up to Mazar-e-Sharif where we met a Mormon. I don't know if he was Mormon himself, but he and his wife lived way out in the countryside, teaching the farmers there to use the Mormon plough. You stand on this wooden triangle and it goes through the sod behind the horse, which he felt was so much better than the tractor for them, because they didn't have a mechanical sense and they couldn't get the spare parts for the tractor. I think he was quite right and successful in what he was doing there.

But all of this leads me to saying, I think we made an impact on the Afghans. I felt it in the Gift Shop, and you felt it in the Rehabilitation Society. And whatever we did, I still like to think that there are Afghans either there or those who will go back that have a soft place in their hearts for Americans.

NEUMANN: Oh, I think that's true, very much so.

Q: Unlike Iran. (laughs)

NEUMANN: (laughs) Oh yes, yes, quite different, quite different.

Q: I think on that note, we'll end today's interviewing. You can think of other things that you want me to fill in with at another time.

NEUMANN: All right.

Q: If you want to do a second interview, we certainly can.

NEUMANN: Fine.

Q: And go on to Morocco and perhaps the differences you perceived under the 1972 Directive policy as different from Afghanistan.

NEUMANN: And also, Morocco as being a very different country.

Q: Yes, a different country.

NEUMANN: I had thought that since Morocco was an outpost of the Moslem religion as Afghanistan was an outpost, sort of way west and way north, that since both were monarchies, that conditions would be very much the same in Morocco as in Afghanistan. Of course, I found out that they are totally different. The women had not had the same restrictions. They dressed differently, even the veiled women, and never covered their eyes, whereas in Afghanistan, the veiled women had their eyes completely covered. The djellabah [long coat worn by Moroccan men or women], the caftan [Moroccan woman's dress], always had slits up the sides so that one saw the Moroccan women's legs. One never saw an Afghan woman's legs when she was veiled unless the burqa [Afghan woman's head to toe veiling cloak] blew open. The road systems, because of the French having been there...the school systems... so much was different in Morocco, even the way the King ran the country from the way the King of Afghanistan had run the country. So I found there was no similarity at all except that the religion was the same religion and the mullahs went to pray, called the prayer five times a day from the minarets.

And Saudi Arabia, again, was very much a Moslem country, but again a very different kind of monarchy, very different attitude toward women and so on.

Q: I meant, too, that we could go more into the Americans in those countries and how they are representing our country... the differences you see. And also, perhaps what you have done in the BOOKFAIR and AAFSW and some of your other activities here.

NEUMANN: And now the Writers' Group.

Q: And the Writers' Group, yes. So you be thinking what you want to say next time.

NEUMANN: All right.

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BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Robert Gerhard Neumann

Spouse entered service: 1966Left Service: 1981

Status: non-Career ambassador

Posts: 1966-1973Afghanistan 1973-1976Morocco 1981Saudi Arabia

Place and Date of birth: December 20, 1915, in Miraj, India; American parents.

Schools: BA, Rollins College, Florida, 1936 Diploma, Zimmern School of International Studies, Geneva, Switzerland, summers of 1936, 1937 Certificate, University of Grenoble, France, 1937 MA, Yale University, 1941. Date and Place of Marriage: July 27,1941. Children:

Ronald Eldredge

Gregory Woodsmall

Marcia Woodsmall, (deceased)

Volunteer and Paid Positions held: A: At Post: Volunteer: Honorary President, American Women's Association, Kabul, Afghanistan, 1967-73; Member, Diplomatic Wives'

Organization, Kabul, Afghanistan, 1967-73; Secretary, 1968; President, 1970; Assistant Treasurer, 1971; Vice-President, 1972; Treasurer, 1973; Member, Board of Directors, Afghan Society for the Rehabilitation of the Physically Handicapped, 1970-73; Honorary President, American Women's Association, Rabat, Morocco, 1973-76; Member, Cercle Diplomatique de Bienfaisance, Rabat, Morocco, 1973-76; Treasurer, 1975-76

B: In U.S.: Paid/professional: Private Secretary to Ruth Woodsmall, General Secretary of World's YWCA, on official trip to Orient, 1938-39 Assistant Warden (director), YWCA Summer Conference Center, Ootacamund, India, 1938 Professional Lecturer on India and International Problems, Wisconsin, 1941-43 Taught Economics and Political Science at State Teachers College, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 1942-43 Information and Liaison Officer, Department of State, Washington, DC, 1943-45 Extension Teacher, correspondence courses in American Diplomatic History for University of Wisconsin, 1946-47, for University of California at Los Angeles, 1949-50 Editorial Associate, YEAR-Mid-Century Edition, 1954 Contributing Editor, YEAR, 1952-56, including YEAR's “The Bible and Christianity,” 1952, “Pictorial History of America,” 1954, “Pictorial History of the World,” 1956 Supervisor, Association of American Foreign Service Women's BOOKFAIR Bookroom, 1977-80 Lecturer on Embassy Life for Military Attach# Wives, Defense Intelligence School, 1978-present.

Volunteer: One of founders of League of Women Voters of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 1942; President thereof, 1942-43 Director of State Fiscal Policy Study, State Board, League of Women Voters of California, 1947-50 Member, Board of Directors, League of Women Voters of Los Angeles, 1949-50; 1952-54; 1956-57; 1961-62; holding various assignments such as UN Item Chairman, Foreign Economic Policy Chairman, Program Coordinator, Assistant to President Consultant on Community Affairs, League of Women Voters of Los Angeles, 1959-60 Director of National UN Study, State Board, League of Women Voters of California, 1962-64 Vice-President, League of Women Voters of California, 1964 LWV Delegate to Los Angeles Area Council of Non-Governmental Organizations Accredited to the United Nations, 1952-54; Chairman of NGO Council, 1956, 1957 Los

Angeles City Civil Service Commissioner, March 1958 to July 1961 (appointed by Mayor, confirmed by City Council) Chairman, World Affairs Committee, Women's Division, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1958-62 Member, Board of Directors, United Nations Association of Los Angeles, 1959-64; and President of Association, 1964-66 Member of Governor's Commission to Investigate the Los Angeles Riots (only woman among eight members appointed by Governor Pat Brown), 1965-68 Recording Secretary, Altar Guild, St. Columba' s Episcopal Church, DC, 1979-1981; member of Altar Guild from 1976 to present Alternate Treasurer and member of Board of Directors, Association of American Foreign Service Women, 1980-81 BOOKFAIR Director, Association of American Foreign Service Women, 1982, 1983; Chairman of Volunteers, BOOKFAIR, 1984 Elected member, Board of Directors of Sumner Village Community Association, 1982-83, 83-84 Member, Writers' Group, Association of American Foreign Service Women, 1985-present.

Languages:French, German, Persian, some Spanish, touch of Arabic

Honors:Chevalier, Confr#rie de l'Ordre de Tastevin, Dijon, France, 1974 AAFSW-AFSA Merit Scholarship named for me in 1986

Publications: Poems in Florida Poets, 1936, edited by Vivian Y. Laramore, The Galleon Press, N.Y., 1936 Articles on India, American Diplomatic History, Religion, published in Survey Graphic, YEAR, The Los Angeles Times HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY RESIDENCE IN KABUL, AFGANISTAN, 1971 Poems in Foreign Service Journal, Guide; children's magazine stories "Emily, Shareefa of Wazan," in A World of Difference, AAFSW Writers' Group, 1987.

End of interview